



Growing the Creative Economy in Connecticut

Good morning Senator Handley, Representatives Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. For the record, we are faculty members and staff from Southern Connecticut State University and we are submitting written testimony on H.B. 5028, AN ACT CONCERNING DEVELOPING THE CREATIVE ECONOMY.

A number of sources have been decrying the state of the economy in Connecticut. Unemployment is up and young people are fleeing the state to establish their careers in places that are supportive of their career aspirations. In order to improve the employment situation in Connecticut, jobs need to be found in areas other than the traditional manufacturing industries.

One area that seems ripe for development is that of the digital media creative industries. By that we mean those industries that produce and distribute creative and intellectually innovative products and services through the use of digital technologies. Connecticut's wealth is with the repositories of information and intellectual and creative innovation, our public and private institutions of higher education. We should be leveraging this resource to grow new information industries and thus grow our state's economy.

One creative industry that has gained attention is the filmmaking industry. A vibrant filmmaking industry in Connecticut would result in jobs and revenue coming back into the state. That industry should be supported. However, that is just one kind of creative industry that needs to be nurtured. Connecticut needs to get out in front of the technology revolution as much as it can. Technology is forcing changes in the ways we organize information, the ways we distribute information, and the ways we use information. Opportunities will arise and Connecticut needs to develop a creative digital media infrastructure to take advantage of these technologies in order to expand the economy.

As an example, Apple recently introduced a tablet device, the iPad, that points to a new direction and opportunity for businesses in the creative digital media industry. The iPad will allow students to download textbooks and it will allow everyone to download books, newspapers, and magazines in an electronic form. This form, however, will not just mimic the old text based print media. Rather, eBooks will use moving images, interactive functions, game style presentation, and something called "augmented reality". Somebody is going to have to produce this kind of work and industries will spring up to do so. Connecticut should be funding initiatives in business and education so that our state will be ready to welcome and encourage this industry.

In order to grow this creative economy, certain conditions need to be met. Connecticut needs to undertake initiatives to facilitate the establishment of these conditions. First, there need to be financial incentives for people to start up businesses in the creative industry. Tax incentives and affordable space are examples. Second, these industries require a base of trained people to support the new industries and to attract businesses and investments into the State. Additional

funding for institutions of higher education to establish or expand programs for training the creative industry workforce would be another example of how the State could accomplish this goal.

One example of a strategy for growing this industry is for the State to provide additional funding for programs like a Master of Fine Arts program in Digital Media Production under consideration at Southern Connecticut State University. That program would draw upon the expertise in the following departments: Communication, Theatre, Music, Art, Journalism, Library Science, English, and Computer Science. A core objective of this program would be to produce students who are able to embrace new technologies as they are developed and recognize the opportunities and challenges that these technologies present. In this way, they will be ready to reinvent their industries as the technology changes and thus continue to keep Connecticut's economy thriving.

Currently, students who graduate from Southern Connecticut State University and who wish to go into these fields tend to leave the state because opportunities in the creative industries are limited here. An example is Elizabeth Missan-Yost, who recently was honored with the Distinguished Alumna Award from Southern. She is the Vice President of Original Programming for the Hallmark Channel where she is in charge of more than twenty-four made-for-TV movies a year. In order to pursue her career in filmmaking she had to move to Hollywood, California although she has family in Trumbull, Connecticut. She has mentioned a number of times that she wishes she could do her work and live in Connecticut. Another former student, Mark Perez, an independent producer/director of reality shows moved to Los Angeles in order to find work. He too would settle in Connecticut if jobs in his field were available. Larry Fitzgerald, Jr., is an independent editor who edits segments for the Emmy Awards show among other projects, and lives in the Los Angeles area. He grew up in Hamden, worked in New Haven for a few years, and had to leave Connecticut and settle in Los Angeles in order to move up in the world of film and video. These are but a few of the many talented, former Connecticut students who have left the state to pursue their careers in the creative industries elsewhere.

To stem this outflow of talent and to grow an industry that will bring jobs and new revenue to Connecticut, the State needs to fund those programs, like Southern Connecticut State University's planned MFA program, that will generate a trained workforce for the new creative digital media industries.

Respectfully submitted,

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